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Kennedy's heroes: A look

By Carlton Beals

Special to the Guardian

AT THE ORANGE BOWL in Miami Dec. 29, President Kennedy and his wife Jacqueline spoke to the released invaders of Cuba, seized at the Bay of Pigs (Playa Giron) April 17, 1961. From José Alfredo Pérez San Roman, commander of Invading Brigade 2506, the President received the flag of that unit, allegedly smuggled out of Cuba after the defeat, and Kennedy promised that the flag would be returned to the invaders "in a free Havana."

The President, in his oath of office, had pledged himself to uphold the laws of the United States, which include all foreign treaties. But in this Miami ceremony, he honored as heroes the motley group which, at his behest, had violated U.S. neutrality laws as well as Cuban sovereignty.

Who are these men Kennedy called "the bravest in the world?" The stories and backgrounds of their leaders can be pieced together from statements they themselves made in Cuba after their capture, from testimony at trials, from interviews on TV and from letters.

FOR EXAMPLE: Take San Roman, the commander who handed his brigade's banner to Kennedy. For ten years he was an officer in the Batista army. After the revolution he got a job with INRA, the

it was first necessary to make mother wives, sisters and sweethearts of the hundreds of other Cubans who fell before our fire, put on mourning; that I had been necessary for this whole spectacle of horror, blood, tears, useless sacrifices and irreparable injuries to fall upon my shoulders . . .

"I have sunk so deep into the mire that no human force can ever get me out."

President Kennedy did his best, and the Miami Orange Bowl saw Roman as knighted, and ready for a new crusade of "idiots."

A DIFFERENT SONG. Manuel Sanguinetti, Buena, civil affairs commander of the invasion forces, was one of the spokesmen for the released prisoners. A few days before the Miami Bowl reunion, he addressed a meeting of 4,000 Cuban exiles. "Today I want no tears. We call everybody to war."

Arturo had spoken differently in a press conference in Havana in May 1961 after his capture at Playa Giron. He spoke bitterly about the U.S. government, whose officials "had planned, trained, subsidized and directed" the invasion. "What was done with the hands was a real crime," he said. "They played with the lives of 1,400 men. I am ready to tell the world before the UN all about the U.S. participation in the invasion."

Arturo has told how, in Cuba after the revolution, he was accused of stealing funds intended for peasants, and was helped by a U.S. secret agent to escape to Miami.

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